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## HOW A WAR BEGINS.

BY GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP, LL.D.

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WHEN our Civil War began I was a boy of ten; but I took an intense interest in it from first to last; drilled and held rank in two or three highly-disciplined and efficient juvenile companies, which often appeared on parade or performed escort duty with the West Point cadets and volunteer troops of the United States, in New York and elsewhere. In the intervals of school duties I undertook to carry on for myself a voluminous manuscript record of current martial events, which was dignified to my mind by the name of a "History"; collected masses of newspaper cuttings; obtained nearly all the useful books relating to the conflict which appeared at that time (including the published official reports of commanders); and gathered all the military maps which could be procured from the government.

The vividness of the impressions made upon me then has never died out. But if any of these are more real and startling in remembrance than others, it is those of the small incidents in daily life, just preceding hostilities; the little things which gradually, yet in the end abruptly, led to a conflagration of public feeling. They were like flying sparks from fireworks with which the whole people were playing; sparks which most of them believed could be quenched with ease, until at last they fell into that storehouse of human explosives, the emotion of a special unforeseen hour; and a rending shock ensued.

It is worth while to recall these things now, when the bounding pulse, the quick flush and premonitory aching of war fever are felt in various members of the civilized world. I recall how, just after the John Brown invasion of Virginia, I visited relatives in Richmond with my parents. We all had the utmost good will towards the Southern folk. My father had lived the first two

years of his married life in Louisiana, though he came from the North; he understood and in many ways sympathized with the people of the South, but this made little difference. They were already in the first stages of febrile vertigo, and could not see us clearly.

My brother and I, walking one day in a street where some digging was going on, were attacked by a number of lads twice our size, whom we did not know, but who had found out that we were Northerners. They picked up clay from the side of the open trench in the street, kneaded it into hard balls, and began firing at us, with derisive shouts reviling us as Yankees and abolitionists. We promptly returned their fire, in self defence, while retreating in good order in face of superior numbers. To this moment I retain the keenness of the feeling that thrilled me then, of indignant grief that peaceable fellows, who wished the others no ill in the world, should be so wantonly and injuriously assailed. That was the only feeling, then. A few days later, something else occurred.

We used to play with our boy cousins and with a large number of other boys, in their recess and after school, on a big open field. One afternoon a diminutive "fire-eater" came up to me while we were at our sports, and, without provocation, began a tirade against me as a representative of the offensive North. Not satisfied with that, he drew out his jack-knife and stabbed me in the hand. Then I desired nothing but his destruction. My cousins closed round me and led me away to avert deadly combat. As they thus forced me off, my eye detected a jagged half-brick lying on the ground. Instantly stooping I picked it up, whirled around and flung it at the stabber, who still followed taunting. The missile barely grazed his temple; and he ceased to taunt. But how grateful have I been ever since that it did not kill him!

There you have, in miniature, a model of the genesis of war; a boy version of it, but significant. First, good will on one side at least; then a grieved yet forgiving sense of undeserved attack; finally, a swift and unreckoning desire for vengeance.

On the other hand, when we came back to the North, I was equally shocked by the habitual utterances of a mature relative, who, being an ardent abolitionist, had decided that the Constitution of the United States, because it did not preclude slavery,

was "a league with death, a covenant with hell." While comfortably devouring steak and creamy stewed potatoes at breakfast, or in the intervals of playing the flute sweetly to piano accompaniment in the evening, he would announce in firm tones—whenever the question of national affairs came up—that he was a "disunionist," that he wished to see the Union destroyed, because to continue it on the basis then existing would be immoral. Bred from my earliest recollection to love of country and of the Union, I could not understand this extreme of disloyalty at the North any more than I could that of hatred and threatening disloyalty at the South.

The war was then still more than a year away, and all but an extremely small minority of the American people, North and South, still believed such a conflict impossible. Every one went about his or her usual avocations, while stormy talk invaded more and more the realm of social conversation, ordinarily deemed to be peaceable. As a very youthful onlooker and listener, I remember how, now and then, friends and relatives among my elders would quarrel upon the impending issue, and how a coolness followed, presaging further heat; how the quarrel would be made up, and how it would break out again. I remember in especial one tall, pale-faced gentleman with a full black beard, who used to converse on the subject by the hour with greatest fluency and ease. He spoke always in a subdued voice, as though he were dreaming, or meditating aloud. He gave no emphasis; his words oozed out in a dull monotone, without rising or falling of the voice. Yet in this deadly, colorless manner of speech he uttered the most bloodthirsty sentiments. As though he were saying "Thank you," with cold politeness, he would declare: "Yes, I should like to see the Southerners all driven into the Gulf of Mexico, and I would like to wade from here to the Gulf though their blood."

Then there were the warlike men of the North who did not talk of wading through blood, like this vampire, but still spoke with a sternness and fierceness that steadily heightened the crisis and hastened the catastrophe. And there were the fiery men of the South, whose haughty and bellicose breathings were like embers glowing always nearer to the point of flame. A curious thing was that there were so many of diverse mind altogether here, visiting, dining and hobnobbing; and that in one breath

they would utter the most appalling challenges, and in the next moment smile and say that, after all, no war between such close kinsfolk was possible, and that everything would be settled calmly before it came to that point. So the confusion and the half hostile, half friendly hurly-burly went on, even after the South Carolina troops were under arms. I remember well the day when the news of the firing on Fort Sumter reached New York. People in this city were still going on in the same state of semi-hilarious, semi-tragic sentiment, and chaffing or scolding one another as though about any customary division of opinion. Many persons on the streets, in hotels, or at home—men, women, children—were wearing what was called “the palmetto cockade,” a blue and white rosette, with a bit of straw palm in the centre, as an emblem of sympathy with the South, or with the Union as it was. Others wore the red, white and blue.

When the news of Sumter came suddenly, every palmetto cockade disappeared in a trice, as though under blight. Every one realised that a new, strange and almost weird condition of things had been precipitated, fraught with peril to all. Yet, up to a few hours before, hardly anyone had believed that such a quick, decisive change could occur, or had even faintly perceived, if it should occur, what a grim meaning it would bear.

That is the way war begins. It is hard to describe the swift, almost breathless, abruptness with which this awful alteration took place, which was to continue in force through four terrible and harrowing years. What had previously been offhand opinion, intemperately expressed, became now either an ecstatic assertion of loyalty to the Union, right or wrong, or an utterance of dangerous treason. Words were no longer mere words, but meant bullets on the coming battlefields. National feeling glowed and shone at white heat; yet withal there was a deep and boding solemnity in the faces of men and women, as they went in and out, and thought and spoke of the deadly trials and sorrows now close at hand for individuals and families as well as for the people considered as a whole. Great numbers still thought, even then, that violence might be averted. A peace convention was held, but deliberated in vain amid unmerited ridicule; and in Philadelphia, near “the Cradle of Liberty,” a great meeting of the best citizens assembled to advocate peace or compromise, the tone of which would seem incredible now to

those who imagine that there was but one voice among patriots, and that voice for war. But it was too late to allay the storm.

The sparks of hasty speech, blown to and fro for two or three years without immediate harm, had fallen into the magazine of stored up emotion. Southerners had proclaimed up and down the highways that the North would never dare to fight, and that, if it did, one Southern man would be a match for four Northerners. The men of the North, on the other hand, with rash valor had asserted that, if it came to fighting, they would whip the South in thirty days. Boast and bickering, mock and sneer had been bandied between them many a day, while they had been carrying on business together or feasting at the same board or visiting each others' houses;—and now all these things were to be put to the test. Soon the time came when a man with a drum would start out along Broadway, and other men from the street, the shops, the hotels—with mad enthusiasm or grim resolve—would fall in behind him at a moment's thought, and the whole procession would march to a recruiting station and enlist. The army was gathering; friendships, families, old ties were being sundered; and grief and patriotism, glory and death were beginning their mystic dance through the land.

Then the big, splendidly equipped regiments from other places poured through the thoroughfare, southward, like a sunny blue tide; while from crowded sidewalks and packed windows came roaring cheers and a dove-like flutter of white handkerchiefs;—a tide which was to have no perceptible ebb. For thousands of these men were never to be seen again. And when, long after, regiments mustered out of service came northward through the city again, they were mere handfuls, battered, worn, dingy, with bullet-shredded flags. They were like men of bronze, sad and stern, with a far-off gaze of the eyes; and they looked neither to right nor left; and there were no cheers or fluttering handkerchiefs, but only awe in our hearts and tears in our eyes as we beheld them.

The most striking thing about it at the beginning was—and one of the most striking is now—that so much misery might have been avoided had people then known what war is, and had they been more self-contained and magnanimous on both sides, when the trouble was brewing. A great principle was involved, a far-

reaching problem was to be settled ; but I have never been convinced that it could not have been rightly settled by popular patience, wise statesmanship, a grand exhibition of manly and Christian conduct.

I confess to an innate love of war ; that martial matters fascinate me ; that I favor a spirited foreign policy, and am jealous in defence of the majesty and honor of the nation. It is no timidity that prompts these reminiscences and reflections. Yet I believe that, in this age of the world, and with our experience, we should remember what war really is and how unexpectedly it often comes. The cloud rises and passes. People say “ the war scare ” is over. Yet they continue to talk war recklessly at intervals. Months go by, and perhaps years. Then suddenly the cloud covers the heavens, and the tempest bursts. Every intemperate word, every rash or unnecessary defiance has gone to swell and surcharge the cloud. It is the people, after all, who make war, in every country—or make it possible. And they make it not so much by a declaration of the Congress or the king as by their careless or unmeasured utterances in times of peace. War is sometimes inevitable, but every citizen has a responsibility, not simply individual, but national, to avoid bringing it on by fiery speech when the issue of force may honorably be prevented by manly self-restraint.

GEORGE PARSONS LATHROP.